



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **Popularity of local farm produce subscriptions grows**

*Growers taking orders now for Community Supported Agriculture deliveries in spring*

**OLYMPIA** – Consumer interest in buying locally grown fruits and vegetables is prompting growth in farm-direct sales, including the number of farmers delivering boxes of freshly harvested produce to workplaces. Despite recent cold, snowy weather, farmers are taking orders now; encouraging people to buy shares early to ensure produce for spring.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) estimates more than 200 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations are in business across the state. Farmers often have customers pick up their weekly produce boxes at their farm or at a central drop point, but increasingly growers are offering to come to the worksite, making it even more convenient for consumers.

Members of a CSA subscription buy a share of a farm's crops early in the year, well before harvest or even before planting. Produce subscribers pay for the entire season—which typically covers 18 to 24 weeks—or make a down payment and then monthly payments.

Small produce shares range in costs from about \$18-\$25 a week. Large shares run about \$30-\$38 a week. Typical boxes include a variety of seasonal produce such as lettuce, peas, tomatoes, carrots, strawberries and chard. Some growers include flowers. Farmers often include a weekly newsletter of farm happenings, a list of what's in the box, and recipes that incorporate produce in the box.

"Paying in advance allows growers to get working capital directly without a loan," said Patrice Barrentine, direct marketing coordinator with WSDA's Small Farm & Direct Marketing Program. "The pre-sales allow farmers to plan production and have a secure market for their harvest."

A state-sponsored pilot project last year shows how popular this innovative marketing tool is becoming. Farmers achieved sales of \$150,000 through weekly produce box deliveries to the Natural Resources Building in Olympia and other state facilities.

Washington Wellness, a unit in the state Health Care Authority, has created an easy-to-use manual on how employers can organize deliveries to their workplace.

"Washington Wellness was an enthusiastic supporter and partner for starting produce deliveries to state offices," Barrentine said. "They see it as a great way to encourage employees to eat healthy foods. The manual

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was developed as a guide to set up CSA deliveries to public agencies, but it would work equally well for the private sector.”

State employees were very enthusiastic about the produce program. According to a customer survey, 92% of the employees liked the convenience of picking up their boxes at work and 77% liked the quality and freshness of the produce. They also reported eating more fruits and vegetables.

A CSA agreement is between a farmer and a customer, not a public agency or business providing the pickup site. The worksite space requirements aren’t extensive—maybe a couple hundred square feet.

At a time when new employee benefits are becoming scarce, the advantages of allowing a farmer to bring wholesome produce to willing employees at the workplace are numerous.

“Employees appreciate the opportunity to buy fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables at work and employers can benefit through promotion of a healthier workforce,” Barrentine said.

To learn more about the benefits of CSA operations, visit the [Washington Wellness](http://www.washingtonwellness.gov/resources_nutrition_csa.shtml) website at [http://www.washingtonwellness.gov/resources\\_nutrition\\_csa.shtml](http://www.washingtonwellness.gov/resources_nutrition_csa.shtml). The site includes:

- A toolkit for establishing a CSA site at the workplace
- Website links to sources for finding farms that operate CSAs
- Information on the benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables, and
- A link to healthy seasonal recipes.

WSDA’s Small Farm & Direct Marketing Program fosters direct-market sales by farmers to capture a higher percentage of the retail food dollar. Direct sales include CSA subscriptions, on-farm sales, farmers markets, Internet sales, agri-tourism, and sales to grocery stores, cafeterias and restaurants. Visit the WSDA website at <http://agr.wa.gov/> and click on the marketing button to locate the [\*Small Farm & Direct Marketing Handbook: Regulations and Strategies for Farm Businesses in Washington State\*](#).

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